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CARVED HISTORY

ORIGINAL

The Totem Poles & House Posts of Sitka National Historical Park

(31)

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CARVED HISTORY

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Introduction

"In the old days..." is the way many of today's Tlingit elders begin their stories. In the old days, the way of life was based on the rich natural resources of southeast Alaska, on respect for all living things, and on a unique and complex social structure.

Totem poles are a reflection of these ways. They are bold statements making public record of the lives and history of the people who had them carved, and represent pride in clans and ancestors. They mark the success and renown of families.

"In the old days" the poles were not found along a neat lane, as they are now in Sitka. Step back in time and see them as they used to stand. Imagine yourself a trader on a European ship plying these waters during the early 19th century fur trade era. Ahead, close by the water, on the shore of a sheltered bay, is a row of single story rectangular cedar houses. The green mantle of the rain forest is close behind them, and the misty mountains rise above. Canoes are pulled up along the beach and people are busy preparing to come out to the ship to trade.

Towering above them, at the corners and in front of the houses, are carved poles whose striking design and colors proclaim the identities and stories of the villagers—if only you could read them.

"If only..." is a problem for us today. In many instances, we do not know enough about the people or the poles to satisfy our interest.

We do know that poles stood along the village fronts of the Haida and Tlingit Indians of northern British Columbia and extreme southeast Alaska, and that carved house posts were used by the Tlingit farther north. The name "totem" is not a local word, but is an Algonquin Indian term describing crests showing natural objects or animals that represent a family group. "Totem" can refer to an individual crest, as well as a whole pole.

To begin to understand totem poles, it is necessary to know that the Tlingit and Haida people are each divided into two major groups called moieties represented by the raven and the eagle in totem art. Within these major divisions are numerous clans. Each clan shares legends, crests or symbols, ancestors, and artifacts, and clan membership is an important source of identification and pride. This system exists today, although many Native traditions are less closely followed than in the past.

Totem poles generally serve one of four purposes: *crest* poles give the ancestry of a particular family; *history* poles record the history of a clan; *legend* poles illustrate folklore or real life experiences; and *memorial* poles commemorate a particular individual. Their first recorded sightings were by European explorers and traders in the late 18th century.

A totem is traditionally carved by an artist of a clan opposite the clan of the person who commissions it. Special occasions among the Tlingit sometimes prompt large celebrations that have come to be called potlatches. New poles often were erected as part of the festivities, or were sometimes themselves the cause for a potlatch. Although missionaries and civil government had almost wiped out large potlatches before World War I, a contemporary version is evolving.

Craftsmen in Cedar: Totems as an Art Form

The carving of bone, wood, and stone is an ancient and distinctive art among the people of the Northwest Coast. Their love of beauty may first have been expressed by the carving of utilitarian objects such as ladles, bowls and boxes, and later developed into the monumental totem poles. Carving continues to evolve today as artists, like those at the park's Cultural Center, teach the craft and produce the works of art.

Before 1830, totem poles, especially the large detached type in this park, were uncommon. It is believed the earliest "totem poles" were structural interior house posts; next to be developed may have been posts at the exterior corners of clan houses. Detached, exterior poles reached their zenith in the late 19th century.

Totem pole carving was traditionally the responsibility of a select group of craftsmen who had been formally trained in an apprenticeship system. The totem crafteman was commissioned by the opposite clan when a large totem, house post, or special memorial pole was needed. The desired size, symbols, and story were related to him in full detail, and he would then carve the pole.

Study of Northwest Coast Indian art shows that style is usually based on the *form line* which scholar Bill Holm describes as a curving, swelling, and diminishing line that establishes the principal shapes and design units within a piece of art. It is this form line that makes two dimensional art forms seem to take on a third dimension. The form line is painted before carving begins.

The general layout of a totem pole is essentially a two-dimensional form line design wrapped around a half cylinder. This is especially true of Haida totem poles. With the use of form line, abstract representations of creatures, either natural or supernatural, can be constructed on flat surfaces.

If painted, the form line is either black or red. Its proportions run from thick to thin and usually travel in a curvilinear pattern to connect and outline the three principal elements found in the art: the ovoid, "U", and "S" shapes.

Black is used on areas to be accented, such as eye pupils, eyelid lines, eyebrows, and claws, as well as in primary form lines. Red is used on lips, nostrils, sometimes bodies, and as a secondary form line element in two-dimensional areas. Blue is used in eye sockets and in two-dimensional design areas.

Early Tlingit and Haida poles are often distinguishable by their layout. Haida figures interconnect and overlap more than Tlingit figures, which are often isolated from each other and present a more rounded and sculptured appearance.

Originally, all paints were made from natural materials, usually consisting of pulverized minerals with masticated salmon eggs and saliva used as a binder. Red was usually obtained from hematite, black from graphite and soot, and the blue/green blends from copper.

In the late 18th century totem carvers began to trade for dry pigments which were then mixed with the natural ones. Today most carvers use commercial paints, although some experiment with the traditional mixtures.

Many older poles throughout Alaska have been repainted using modern paints and non-traditional colors. Several poles in this park were repainted in this manner, although the paint has been removed in most cases.

How the Totem Poles Came to Sitka

In June 1890, President Benjamin Harrison set aside, as a public park, the historic site of the Kiksádi Tlingit fort at the mouth of Indian River in Sitka, the forerunner of today's national historical park. John G. Brady, Alaska's fifth territorial governor, had a great

interest in Native people and their cultures, and may have influenced President Harrison's decision. Largely through Governor Brady's efforts, 18 of the poles in this park were collected and placed here. Most are Haida in origin and none are originally from Sitka.

The first poles received for the park are described by the following synopsis of 1902 news articles from Sitka's *THE ALASKAN*. Copies of these pieces are described under Trail Stop 12.

> The tall totem pole that was presented to the people of Alaska by Chief Son-i-hat of Kasaan now stands in Indian River Park along with four house posts that were also the gift of Son-i-hat. The big pole was erected during the past week by the crew of the Revenue Cutter *Richard Rush*, assisted by George Kostrometinoff and a gang of prisoners from the jail.
> Son-i-hat, a Haida chief, presented the pole, the house posts, a war canoe and a big log community house to the people of the District of Alaska through Governor John G. Brady . . .
> The big totem is more than seventy years old and time and the elements left their marks, but trimming away about a half-inch of the surface has removed most of these. The pole was painted by Klay-nay-hoo, known as Jim the Jeweler, before it was erected at the park.

The U.S. Revenue Cutter *Rush* also played an important role in gathering other poles placed here in the park. Congress, in 1903, appropriated $50,000 for Alaska's participation in the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis. Brady gathered 20 totem poles from Prince of Wales Island, about 125 miles south of Sitka. Although the exact sources are not clear, both *Rush*'s log and Governor Brady's report indicate that sources included the Tlingit villages of Tuxekan and Klawock, and the Haida villages of Howkan, Klinkwan, Sukkwan, Old Kasaan, and Koinglas.

Some recarving, patching and repainting was done and the poles were shipped to St. Louis. After the fair, some totems were in such poor condition that they were sold. The remaining poles were sent to the Lewis and Clark Exposition in Portland, and then shipped back to Sitka aboard the steamer *Alki* in 1905.

Sitka photographer and artist E. W. Merrill supervised the erection of the totems at carefully selected sites in the park. Contemporaries recall his repairing and painting the poles, often at his own expense.

In 1922 the National Park Service arranged for the Alaska Road Commission to supervise the park, which had been proclaimed Sitka National Monument by President William Howard Taft in 1910 and placed in the National Park System in 1916. Peter Trierschield, a Sitka resident, was appointed caretaker, and his period of service was a constant battle against rot and deterioration.

In April 1938, Alaska Territorial Governor John Troy wrote the Director of the National Park Service suggesting a rehabilitation program for the poles through the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) program. The project began in 1939 with Native artisans doing the repair and restoration work.

This and other repair projects, although extending the life of some of the poles, created problems from the perspective of today's historians and curators. It is believed that designs were altered slightly each time the poles were copied or repaired, so that today's poles may differ significantly from those produced by the original artists. A second problem has been the loss or decay of pieces of poles either completely or partially recarved in the CCC project. For a time the poles lay along the trail in the park, next to their reproductions. In an attempt to salvage them, they were placed at the Sitka Naval Air Station on Japonsky Island in 1942. Unfortunately, poor storage conditions led to continued decay, and only a few fragments survive today. Currently, only 9 or 10 of the poles along the park trails are originals that predate the St. Louis Exposition.

The origin of many of the poles in Sitka National Historical Park remains a mystery due to incomplete and confusing records. The best method for tracing them is to learn the clan affiliations of residents of the villages at the time the poles were collected and then find corresponding crests or legends on the totems. The legends and history depicted by the poles come from the oral history of the Tlingit and Haida people; in some cases they remain the secret property of a family or clan. Because of the passage of time, civil and missionary pressures on Natives to abandon their traditional culture, and physical alterations of the poles, it is difficult, often impossible, to document or clearly understand legends associated with them.

Interpreting Totems

A stroll through the park with particular attention paid to aesthetics will provide a taste of the skills of these creative and talented artists, of their forest and ocean world, and of their respect for every living thing in it. The brief narratives in this booklet describe the individual poles as well as records allow. In some cases the records are conflicting; in others there is little or nothing available. That scant amount, however, has helped many visitors deepen their understanding of the Tlingit and Haida people of southeast Alaska.

Interpretation of totem poles must be approached with caution. Though the stylized figures of Raven, Eagle, or Beaver can be easily recognized on a pole, a deeper, more thorough knowledge of the Native peoples and their history is necessary to properly interpret any pole's story. When an animal, usually Raven, is referred to by a proper noun, that animal plays the role of a legendary cultural hero with human characteristics in that particular context. Lower case references usually refer to the animal in a generic sense. Many of the stories and events associated with totem poles have been lost over time. Others are interpreted differently by different clans and communities.

Visitor Center Exhibits

Among the physical expressions of Tlingit culture are house posts, totem poles, Chilkat blanket weaving, spruce root basketry, button blankets, metal shields, jewelry, and beadwork. Tlingits live in close association with the land and the animals of the forest and the sea, as evidenced by the art forms that are on exhibit in the lobby. Today the way of life of the Tlingit has changed so much that some elders worry about perpetuation of clan property. To preserve these artifacts and to keep them in Sitka, several custodians have chosen to place selected objects on loan in the visitor center at Sitka National Historical Park.

Although this publication is limited to wooden totems, the park staff will be pleased to provide information about other objects on display

The Liuknax.adi Frog Sculpture

This sculpture is a frog emblem carved for the Coho people by Kaagwaantaan artist John Silverman for the 1904 potlatch. It is a copy of one destroyed earlier by Kiksádi people who disputed the Coho people's use of the frog crest. The Coho people claim that the crest is based on an event during the construction of a new clan house in Klukwan many years ago when they discovered a giant frog underground.

Erected in the Coho frog house in Sitka, the sculpture was rigged to bow whenever anyone opened the front door. The Frog and the Sleeping Man pole to its right are part of the late Frank Kitka's collection; they were placed on long-term loan in the visitor center in 1971 by his heirs.

Sleeping Man Legend Pole

At the top of this pole are two salmon, symbols of the Coho Salmon clan, a subdivision among the Tlingit Indians of the Raven family. The faces below the coho salmon represent the village people killed by the octopus. Sleeping Man is the next figure. The octopus is the face at the base of the pole, with its tentacles extending up to Sleeping Man and the Coho people. The face in the center is Sleeping Man's slave. The animals above and below the slave represent bear, the emblem of the slave.

This pole is an example of a legend pole, one that tells a story. It differs in this way from a crest, history, or memorial pole.

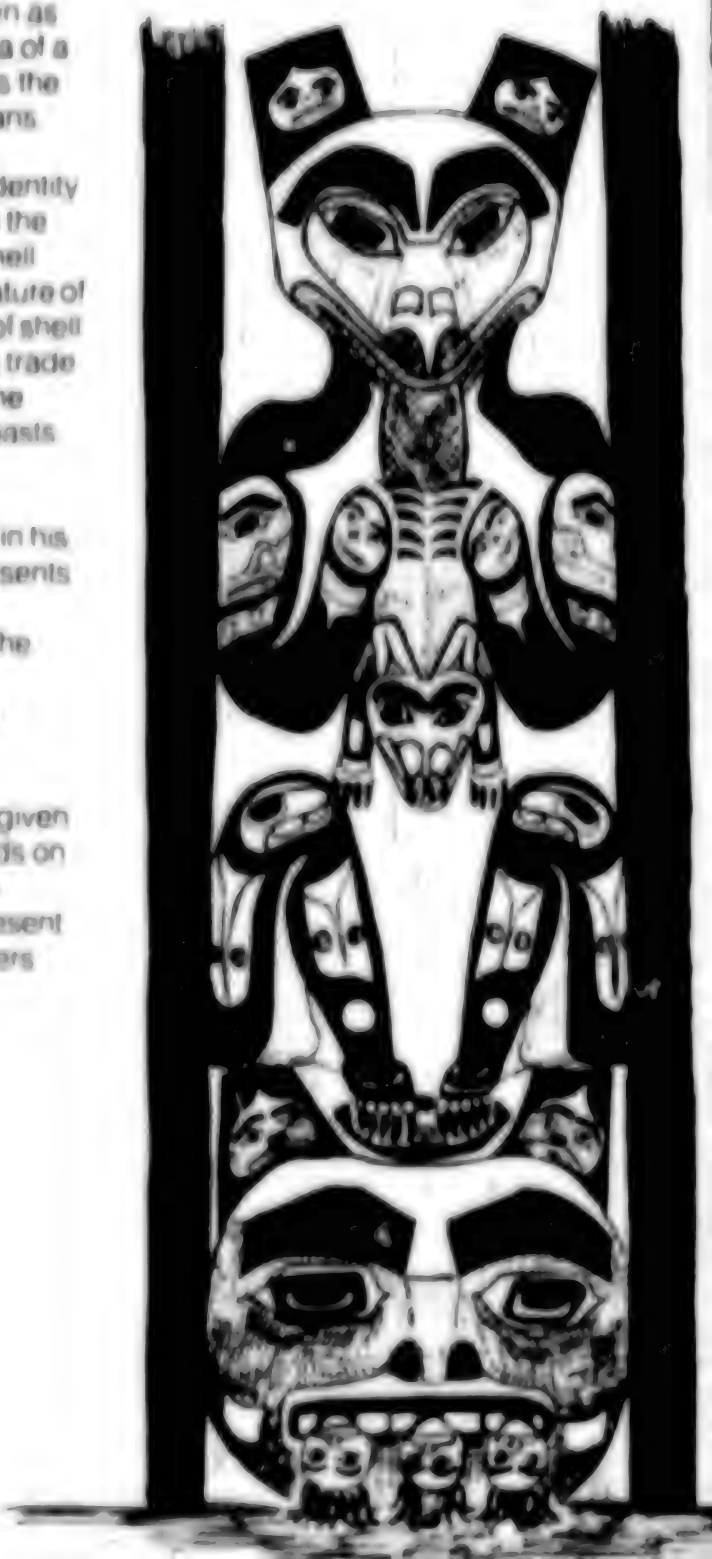
Kaagwaantaan Wolf House Posts

The large house post across from the windows is known as Panting Wolf. It is a replica of a very old house post and is the crest of the Kaagwaantaans.

Much of the history and identity of the clan is told through the totem figures. Abalone shell inlay is an outstanding feature of this house post. This use of shell indicated wealth, it was a trade item from the Indians of the Oregon and California coasts.

The large wolf in a sitting position holds a little wolf in his paws. The little wolf represents the importance of future generations of the clan. The tongue extended to him represents the transfer of knowledge.

Several explanations are given for the three inverted heads on the house post. One interpretation is that they represent three clans whose members came to the potlatch.



The two posts on either side of the reception desk are known as Multiplying Wolf. Use of copper indicates clan wealth and prestige, since it was obtained by trading with the Copper River Indians to the north. The two young wolves facing each other at the bottom signify the time the clan outgrew its clan house and had to move to new houses.

These three house posts are spruce, rather than the more typical cedar. Prepared for the last big potlatch given by the Tlingits in southeast Alaska in 1904, they were carved for the respected leader *Anaxóots*. The posts were in his clan house until it was torn down in 1959.

These Kaagwaantaan house posts are on long-term loan to the park from the Gooch *Hit* (Wolf House) in Sitka. Please honor the owners' request to refrain from commercial photography without special permission.

Kaagwaantaan
Mother Eagle House Posts

These four similar posts are from inside the Eagle Nest House of the Kaagwaantaan clan in Sitka and may be about 200 years old.

Their design depicts the Mother Eagle story, in which a young eagle brings fish from the sea to feed a girl and her grandmother who are the only survivors of a terrible sickness among the members of the clan. The girl had taught the eagle to believe she was its mother. The girl survives, matures, and marries a man from the opposite moiety, and Kaagwaantaan children are born, insuring the survival of the clan.

All of these posts illustrate the Mother Eagle in slightly different forms, each sitting atop a round figure with a face that represents its nest. The face in the nest tells, in totem art, that it too has life and should be respected, for the Tlingit feel that there is life in everything.

The posts on the left are more decorative than those on the right and were displayed in the back of the house where the high caste people and important visitors spent their time. Like all house posts these stood inside and were structurally important in supporting the clan house roof. The notches cut in the tops show where the main roof poles rested.

These house posts were loaned to the park by the Kaagwaantaan clan of Sitka.

1

Outdoor Totems

To see the totem poles along the Governor's Walk, leave the lobby through the double doors facing Sitka Sound and follow the trail to your left. Just outside, be sure to look up at the Kaagwaantaan (Wolf) Clan house front above the doors.

Small ground level markers indicate pole numbers, starting with The Yaadaas Crest Pole and ending with the cluster of poles at the visitor center entrance. The trail is a one-mile loop.

Also along the trail is the site of the 1804 Kiksádi fort and battleground that marked the last major Native resistance to Russian domination. This historic site is the reason the park was originally set aside.

Yaadaas Crest Pole

This pole is from the house of *Dzeitu* in the Haida village of Kasaan. The two human figures on top are called Village Watchmen, and are used in many Haida and some Tlingit carvings. These watchmen kept vigil for enemies. The figure below is Raven with his tongue reaching down to a bear-like figure. One source indicates this is a symbol of transference of knowledge. The next figure, a bear, holds a human form which is, in turn, changing into an animal. The bottom figure is also a bear. The bear and Raven are both crests of the Yaadaas clan of Kasaan.

2

Yaadaas Crest Corner Pole

This pole stood at one of the exterior corners of the Yaadaas clan house. The human figure at the top is the Village Watchman. Below the Watchman is Raven in Human Form. The next figure is also Raven, while the base figure appears to be a bear holding an animal of some type in its mouth. Figures below the Village Watchman may be crests of the clan who owned the house, and could represent incidents in the real or mythical history of the clan.

This pole is a copy carved by Tlingit artist Tommy Jimmie in 1978 to replace the original collected in 1903. It is believed to be a crest pole portraying, as does the Yaadaas Crest Pole just passed, the heraldic emblems of the Yaadaas clan of Old Kasaan. Fragments of the original pole remain in the possession of the National Park Service.

In the past, this pole was referred to as First Twin, since it and the pole at Trail Stop 6, portray the same figures and are from the same house.

3

Wolf Pole

This pole is named for the prominent wolf totem at its center. It appears to be Tlingit in the style of carving, but its origin and meaning are unclear. The pole has withstood years of patching and repairing, and is one of the originals collected from Prince of Wales Island in 1903.

This is probably a crest pole. The top figure is a man, perhaps the Village Watchman or the pole's owner. Next is a wolf, recognized by its pointed ears. The bottom figure is a salmon. The wolf and salmon may represent clan crest symbols or they may identify the clan crests of a husband and wife. One interpretation of the pole identifies the salmon as sockeye and suggests it symbolizes a legend of a boy who was captured by the Dog Salmon people.

4

Memorial/ Mortuary Column

Memorial and mortuary columns were common pole types found in southeast Alaska. In early days, the dead were sometimes cremated. The back side of a mortuary column often had a hole used as a receptacle for the ashes of the honored dead. A mortuary or memorial column was usually topped by a single figure indicating the clan or moiety of the person interred or honored.

There seems to be a fine distinction between memorial and mortuary poles. The mortuary pole was an actual column of interment, while the memorial pole may have been a gravemarker. In some instances a memorial pole was raised to honor a living person.

The similarities in construction and appearance of these two types of poles make it difficult to determine their original purposes.

Though the totem at the top of the column is similar to Raven in form, the feathers on the back of the head and wings and the length of the beak suggest a cormorant. This pole is a 1979 copy of one collected by Brady in 1903; the original is being preserved by the National Park Service.

5

Frog/Raven Pole

Although some interpretations describe this as a legend pole, showing Raven as the mischief maker, other sources indicate that it is a Haida crest pole, possibly from Sukkwan, displaying the raven and the frog crests of the people there. Unfortunately, little information on its origin is available.

Through the years, many techniques have been used to preserve the totem poles. Since they were originally placed in the park in 1908, many have been patched with insert work, rotted surfaces have been trimmed away, features have been reshaped to eliminate decayed areas, and fresh coats of paint have been applied.

The original Frog/Raven column was patched, trimmed, and painted, but by 1939, park records state "[It is] doubtful if it can be repaired, for when it dries out for working, it may fall apart." This replica was carved during the early 1940's, reportedly by George Benson and John Sam.

6

Yaadaas Crest Corner Pole

It is interesting to compare this original pole to the copy of its "twin" at Trail Stop 2.

Totem pole carving, as described by Edward Keithahn in *Monuments in Cedar*, was a prescribed art. "The carver as an artist had little if any personal liberty in his work, his contribution being skill and dexterity and a knowledge of the traditional style. He was told exactly what was to be carved on the monument, and tradi tional style ... dictated the style and manner in which the conventionalized figures would appear in the sculpture." Therefore, it is possible that different artists could have carved the two poles, producing pieces almost identical in appearance.

The figures on this pole, as at Trail Stop 2, are the Village Watchman, Raven in Human Form, Raven, and a bear.

7

Trader Legend Pole

This is an example of a ridicule pole, a type of legend pole usually erected to notify everyone of an unpaid debt. The top figure represents a white man, indicated by the use of curly hair and a beard. Perhaps he is a trader who cheated the Haida. The next figure is holding a shrimp in its mouth, a symbol said to represent a thief. The next figure is a crab, also a symbol of thievery. The bottom figure is a beaver, recognized by its teeth and tail. The pole originally stood in the Haida village of Sukkwan. It may have belonged to the clan of that village which claimed the beaver as its crest, or stealing beaver pelts may have been this man's transgression. A photograph of the pole at its Sukkwan site is found in *Monuments in Cedar* by Edward Keithahn.

Erosion and decay took their toll on the original, and this replica was carved in the 1938-42 CCC project.

An interesting sidelight is that while this copy was being made in Sitka, a local story involving an unfair trader grew around it. That story has become so real to some local residents that the pole is assumed to be a Sitka original.

8

Raven Memorial Pole

Raven is portrayed on this memorial column, distinguished by his rather large, slightly hooked beak. The carving is in the style and is believed to have come from the village of Tuxekan. This copy was carved by George Federoff, after the original was accidentally burned in 1959.

In Sitka, the Tlingits placed their memorial poles on the ridge behind their village (along present-day Katlian Street) overlooking the channel.

Memorial poles, along with house posts, are among the oldest forms of totem poles. The narrative for Trail Stop 4 gives detailed information about them.

9

Gaanaxadi/ Raven Crest Pole

This original pole from the Tlingit village of Tuxekan has been significantly altered. The top figure is probably Raven holding a crescent moon, although changes in wings and disappearance of the moon have led some to identify the carving as an owl. There are also changes in the bottom figure, again said to represent Raven. Comparisons stem from a picture of this pole in its original condition and location, part of the park's collection of E. W. Merrill photographs.

It is unclear whether this is a story pole or a crest pole. One legend, called "Raven and the Whale," is suggested by the figure of the whale near the center of the pole.

In that story, Raven somehow found himself inside a whale. Hungry, he lit a fire, thinking he might eat some parts of the whale. The whale soon died, and eventually floated ashore with Raven trapped inside. When he heard the voices of villagers approaching the beached whale, Raven began making noise. The villagers became curious about the noise, and cut open the whale. Raven quickly stepped out, hungry as always, and tricked the villagers into leaving him lots of food.

10

Lakich'inei Pole

The origin of this pole is unknown. Although the top figure is the subject of an ancient Tlingit legend, there is some evidence that the pole came from a Haida village. It has been suggested that Haida carvers learned of crests and legends of the Tlingit through intermarriage, and sometimes incorporated them into poles carved for their own villages.

Lakich'inei, the top figure, is pressing one of his children, who was half-human and half-dog, against his coat made from the spine of a fish, killing the child.

The mid-pole figure appears to be Bear Who Married a Woman, also a legend found among the Tlingit, and the bottom figure is Bear with a snail or shrimp-like creature in his mouth.

Park records from 1939 indicate large areas of decay in the original pole but do not state whether it was replaced or has survived until today.

11

Mosquito Legend Pole

A totem pole carver was a professional artist, and a fine craftsman's reputation could spread throughout the region. Among the people of northern British Columbia and southeast Alaska, Haida carvers were considered most accomplished and commissions could come from Tlingit as well as Haida villages. This pole could have been produced under such circumstances.

Although Haida in design and topped by the familiar Village Watchman, a Tlingit figure, *Goo-teekhl*, associated with the creature from which mosquitoes originated, is the second totem on this pole. Below the mosquito is a bear, while the bottom figure is probably a devilfish or octopus, recognized by the suction cups used as eyebrows.

This pole, a copy of the original, was recarved by Frank Kitka in the 1938-41 CCC project.

The following is a synopsis of the mosquito legend as told in John Swanton's *Tlingit Myths and Texts*.

An unnatural child was born to a chief's daughter; not exactly human in form. She fed on [illegible] people on his knees. One day, the neighbor argued with [illegible] killed her by driving the whole people into the ocean. After a long time they saw the [illegible] among the [illegible] other villagers, but hunting [illegible]

One of the village men, the boy's uncle, set a trap for the bear and succeeded in wounding him with a poison arrow. His uncle, inspired him by following his instructions and successfully hunted him. The boy protected and prepared for his life, but the uncle killed him for revenge. He [illegible] in many villages. Finding [illegible] high hornets, leaving only [illegible] These [illegible] by the wind and [illegible] mosquitoes that [illegible] world [illegible]

12

Saanaheit Pole and House Posts

Rising more than 50 feet, this pole is a copy of a pole given to Governor John Brady in 1901 by *Saanaheit*, a resident of the village of Old Kasaan. The original of this very tall pole may have been an entrance pole, because of the small hump at the base that could indicate the top of a door opening. A Sitka newspaper article from 1902 states that the pole was then more than 70 years old. It was repaired in Governor Brady's sawmill, shipped to the 1904 St. Louis Exposition, then to the 1905 Lewis and Clark Exposition in Portland, Oregon, and finally back to Sitka. During the CCC project, when it was about 110 years old, the pole was lowered, laid out alongside a new cedar log (made by joining two large logs), and a copy was carved using the designs of the original pole. Although several figures such as the traditional Village Watchmen, a bear, and Raven are identifiable, other figures are not, and little information about this intricately carved giant has survived.

The four short poles are indoor house posts and are also gifts from *Saanaheit* to Governor Brady. The notches in the tops were cut to receive the large log beams of the house. These posts were placed at the corners of the large, single story dwelling. Illustrations on the house posts are said to be from a legend in which Raven obtains the sun, moon and stars for the people of the earth. These posts are the originals, brought to Sitka from Kasaan in 1901.

13

Waasgo Legend Pole

This pole is a Haida story pole, possibly from the village of Sukkwan. It tells the story of *Waasgo*, the lake or sea monster.

The top figure is the main character in the story, the mother-in-law. Legend indicates that great rivalry existed between the mother-in-law and the son-in-law. In time he secretly caught the lake monster. With its skin he found he could exercise great powers and thus outwit his mother-in-law. The figures at the bottom, according to one source, are the son-in-law in the skin of the monster holding a whale in his mouth.

This legend, although varying in detail, is shared by the Tlingit and Haida people. The sea monster in Tlingit legend is *Gunakadeit*.

This is a copy of the original pole collected from Prince of Wales Island in 1903. By the late 1930's, the original pole was beyond repair, and Tlingit carver George Benson recarved it as part of the 1938–41 CCC project. In 1964 this pole was shown at the New York World's Fair.

14

Raven/ Shark Pole

There are differing versions of the meaning and origin of this pole. Though it appears to be Tlingit Clans in Tuxekan, the Tlingit community from which the pole may have come, claim the totem figures carved here as their crests.

The figures on the pole appear to be, from top to bottom, Raven, a shark or dogfish, a wolf or fox, and a bear or stump. In some instances, a bear used as the base figure on the totem pole symbolizes that the story had its origin at the beginning of time.

In 1964 the original Raven/Shark Pole was part of the Alaska Exhibit at the New York World's Fair. By 1978 that pole had decayed and was replaced by a copy carved by Tommy Jimmie.

The following is one version of a Tlingit Raven/Shark legend.

15

Bicentennial Pole

A design competition in honor of the Nation's Bicentennial led to the 1976 selection of Duane Pasco, noted Northwest Coast artist, to carve this 27-foot totem pole depicting 200 years of Pacific Northwest Coast Indian cultural history. The design is in keeping with traditional form and style.

The top figure is the Northwest Coast Indian of today, weighing his values —the old way against the new, the effect of technology and industry on the people and the ecology of the area. The figure below signifies the arrival of the white man, bringing with him firearms, documents, and Christianity. In his right hand is a rolled document, signifying a long line of treaties.

The third segment of the pole shows Raven and Eagle, holding a copper shield used in inter-tribal commerce, and Salmon, symbolizing abundant food resources. The bottom figure is the Northwest Coast Indian before the arrival of the white man, living close to nature, sharing a rich material culture and ceremonial life.

This pole is incomplete and symbolizes the unknown future of the Northwest Coast Indians. In the hands of the top figure are two staffs. The staff in the left hand is richly carved, symbolizing the abundant cultural heritage of the past. The staff in the right hand is bare, yet to be carved. What that future will bring remains to be seen.

For Further Reading

The following books are suggested for additional reading as they offer a broad range of information on totem poles and legends. The list is by no means exhaustive, but will set the reader on the way to a deeper understanding and appreciation.

Tlingit Stories, Marie Ackerman
Totem Poles, M. Barbeau
The Wolf and the Raven, Viola E. Garfield and Linn Forrest
Northwest Coast Indian Art—An Analysis of Form, Bill Holm
Monuments in Cedar, Edward L. Keithahn
Raven Who Sets Things Right, Fran Martin
Kahtahah, Frances L. Paul
Tlingit Myths and Texts, John R. Swanton

END

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